



(19)

Europäisches Patentamt

European Patent Office

Office européen des brevets



(11)

EP 1 085 444 A3

(12)

## EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(88) Date of publication A3:  
09.04.2003 Bulletin 2003/15

(51) Int Cl. 7: G06F 17/60

(43) Date of publication A2:  
21.03.2001 Bulletin 2001/12

(21) Application number: 00308239.3

(22) Date of filing: 20.09.2000

(84) Designated Contracting States:  
AT BE CH CY DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU  
MC NL PT SEDesignated Extension States:  
AL LT LV MK RO SI

(30) Priority: 20.09.1999 US 399417

(71) Applicant: MICROSOFT CORPORATION  
Redmond, Washington 98052-6399 (US)

(72) Inventors:

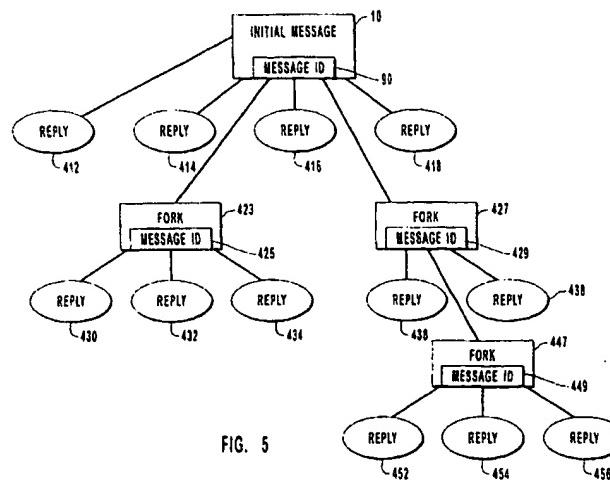
- Ahmed, Muhammad A  
NO 202 Seattle, WA 98105 (US)
- Alam, Muhammad Shabbir  
NO 2801 Bellevue, Washington 98007 (US)

(74) Representative: Orr, William McLean  
URQUHART-DYKES & LORD  
5th Floor, Tower House  
Merrion Way  
Leeds West Yorkshire, LS2 8PA (GB)

## (54) Thread based e-mail

(57) Systems and methods for providing electronic messaging services to multiple users by storing a single copy of an electronic message at a central location and notifying recipients of the stored single copy. An electronic message includes a distribution list and a message content. A distribution list identifying multiple recipients causes prior art systems to duplicate the entire message for each recipient, placing potentially large demands on both processing power and storage space. In contrast, the systems and methods disclosed herein store a single copy or a limited number of copies of an

electronic message addressed to multiple recipients and provide each recipient with a relatively small notification. In addition to providing information regarding content and origin, the notification also provides access to the stored message. Furthermore, the methods and systems also aid in organizing replies to electronic messages. Replies are associated with an initial message through a message identifier. The association helps to organize electronic messages by subject and provides context without requiring an author to duplicate the content of the initial message with the reply.



# BEST AVAILABLE COPY

EP 1 085 444 A3



European Patent  
Office

## EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number

EP 00 30 8239

| DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT |   |  |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Category                            | Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages   | Relevant to claim                      | CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.7)            |
| X                                   | US 5 930 471 A (SMITH THOMAS M ET AL)<br>27 July 1999 (1999-07-27)<br><br>* abstract; figures 2,3 *<br>* column 3, line 40 - column 7, line 21 *<br>Appendix 1<br>* the whole document *  | 1-3,7,<br>10,12,<br>29-31,<br>42-44    | G06F17/60   |
| A                                   | ---   | 4-6,8,9,<br>11,<br>13-20,<br>32-34     |   |
| X                                   | EP 0 471 639 A (IBM)<br>19 February 1992 (1992-02-19)<br><br>* the whole document *   | 1,3,6-8,<br>10,12,<br>29,31,<br>42-44  |   |
| X                                   | EP 0 739 115 A (AT & T CORP)<br>23 October 1996 (1996-10-23)<br><br>* the whole document *  | 1,2,7,<br>10-12,<br>20,29,<br>30,42-44 |   |
| X                                   | "DISTRIBUTING A DOCUMENT USING A REGIONAL REFERENCE"<br>IBM TECHNICAL DISCLOSURE BULLETIN, IBM CORP. NEW YORK, US,<br>vol. 33, no. 3A,<br>1 August 1990 (1990-08-01), page 251<br>XP000123925<br>ISSN: 0018-8689<br>* page 1 - page 1 * | 1,7,10                                 | TECHNICAL FIELDS<br>SEARCHED (Int.Cl.7)<br>H04L<br>G06F |
| A                                   | EP 0 785 661 A (AT & T CORP)<br>23 July 1997 (1997-07-23)<br>* abstract *   | 9                                      |   |

The present search report has been drawn up for all claims

| Place of search   | Date of completion of the search | Examiner |
|---|----------------------------------|----------|
| MUNICH  | 3 December 2002                  | Huber, A |
| CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS   |                                  |          |
| X : particularly relevant if taken alone<br>Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category<br>A : technological background<br>O : non-written disclosure<br>P : intermediate document |                                  |          |

EPO FORM 1503 03/82 (PC4CO1)

T : theory or principle underlying the invention  
E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date  
D : document cited in the application  
L : document cited for other reasons  
& : member of the same patent family, corresponding document

# BEST AVAILABLE COPY

EP 1 085 444 A3



European Patent  
Office

Application Number

EP 00 30 8239

## CLAIMS INCURRING FEES

The present European patent application comprised at the time of filing more than ten claims.

- Only part of the claims have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims and for those claims for which claims fees have been paid, namely claim(s):
  
- No claims fees have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims.

## LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

see sheet B

- All further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for all claims.
- As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fee, the Search Division did not invite payment of any additional fee.
- Only part of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the inventions in respect of which search fees have been paid, namely claims:
  
- None of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the invention first mentioned in the claims, namely claims:

1-20, 29-34, 42-44

# BEST AVAILABLE COPY

EP 1 085 444 A3



European Patent  
Office

## LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION SHEET B

Application Number

EP 00 30 8239

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

1. Claims: 1-20, 29-34, 42-44

Delivering a single electronic message to multiple recipients by storing a copy of said electronic message at a message host, and by sending notification messages including a reference to said copy of said electronic message from said message host to said recipients.

2. Claims: 21-28, 35-41, 45-47

Organising replies to electronic messages by assigning a unique identifier to an electronic message, and by using this unique identifier to associate the one or more replies with the electronic message.

# BEST AVAILABLE COPY

EP 1 085 444 A3

## ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.

EP 00 30 8239

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report.  
The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on  
The European Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

03-12-2002

| Patent document cited in search report |   | Publication date |    | Patent family member(s) | Publication date |
|--|---|------------------|----|-------------------------|------------------|
| US 5930471                             | A | 27-07-1999       | WO | 9829994 A1              | 09-07-1998       |
| EP 0471639                             | A | 19-02-1992       | US | 5144557 A               | 01-09-1992       |
|  |   |                  | EP | 0471639 A2              | 19-02-1992       |
|  |   |                  | JP | 1993558 C               | 22-11-1995       |
|  |   |                  | JP | 6067999 A               | 11-03-1994       |
|  |   |                  | JP | 7027499 B               | 29-03-1995       |
| EP 0739115                             | A | 23-10-1996       | CA | 2172746 A1              | 21-10-1996       |
|  |   |                  | EP | 0739115 A2              | 23-10-1996       |
|  |   |                  | JP | 8307452 A               | 22-11-1996       |
|  |   |                  | US | 5941946 A               | 24-08-1999       |
| EP 0785661                             | A | 23-07-1997       | US | 5781614 A               | 14-07-1998       |
|  |   |                  | AU | 1019197 A               | 24-07-1997       |
|  |   |                  | CA | 2189089 A1              | 20-07-1997       |
|  |   |                  | EP | 0785661 A2              | 23-07-1997       |
|  |   |                  | JP | 9233197 A               | 05-09-1997       |